



A Bright Sadness

Ash Wednesday

Forty days. That's how long Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting, praying, and encountering temptation. When that refining time had passed, he invited twelve to be his disciples and beckoned all who would hear to submit their lives to Him.

Forty days is also the length of the season of Lent. Spanning from Ash Wednesday until the day before Easter (Holy Saturday), Lent is a time during which many faith traditions encourage an extended period of fasting, reflection, and prayer to align ourselves in similar ways to the wilderness experience of Jesus.

While Lent may be viewed as solemn, even dour, it does traverse the full experiential spectrum as we consider the ministry and final days of Jesus. There's despair and joy. Darkness and light. And at the end, what began as a triumphal entry on a palm-branched pathway ended in the horror of Golgotha. These contrary events and images mirror our own journey of faith, which is anchored to hope but infused with suffering.

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Lenten season is referred to as a "bright sadness." That phrase, "bright sadness," brings to mind the idea of lament. Lament is often understood to be an expression of sorrow, disappointment, or loss. It is indeed those things. Yet when considered in the context of faith, lament has an inherent component of confidence. An expectation that in the end, God can be trusted to be with us and be our comfort – even in our sad, disappointing, exhausting, and frustrating moments. Moments that are worthy of lamenting.

So over the weeks of Lent, our desire is to sit with our lament. To welcome the bright sadness of our lives and invite God's presence. Each week we'll consider a different focus for our lamenting, holding an aspect of our struggle alongside something good that is ours because of Jesus.

To assist us we'll use an ancient prayer from Saint Francis of Assisi. In this short prayer, St. Francis presents several contrasting emotions: one bright and life-giving, the other sorrowful and depleting. Each week over the six weeks of Lent we'll extract a portion of that prayer and join it with a bit of scripture, a few prompts, and an image.



We won't provide a lot of content or prescribe a specific way to engage what's offered. We believe good things can surface through slow, focused, Spirit-led reflection. So we encourage a daily engagement or re-engagement with some aspect of the focused lament, asking God to open your mind and soul to new revelations and understanding about yourself, and about Him.

Our hope is this lenten journey will provide a transformative experience as we accept the pain and sorrow of our lives while also receiving the love, grace, and forgiveness that welcomes us into the bright hope of tomorrow. That hope was made real and sure through the passion of our Savior, Jesus, who embraced an eternal bright sadness through his obedient death and victorious resurrection.



Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

What's Next?

During the season of Lent, we invite you to intentionally reserve time in your schedule – from now until Easter – for a consistent practice of prayer and reflection. Invite God into that commitment, knowing that He is eager to offer you more of Himself.

Then, for the six full weeks after Ash Wednesday, we invite you to use the weekly meditation to focus your lament. As mentioned above, that meditation will contain scripture, a highlighted portion of the Prayer of St. Francis, an image, and some prompts. Please use these if they are helpful, but freely explore other ways God is meeting you in this exploration of your bright sadness.



Links for the weekly lament can be found at redcloverabbey.org/resources. Here are some ways you might engage that material:

- Use one or more of the prompts for contemplation, reflection, and prayer.
- In addition to using the prompts, pray the prayer of St. Francis each day.
- Take Sunday through Wednesday of the week to focus on “The Sad,” Wednesday through Saturday on “The Bright,” but be flexible to dwell where the Spirit leads.
- Spend a day or more reflecting on the image in the document. What do you see? Does the image provoke any emotions, feelings, memories, etc.? How are you experiencing God through this image?
- Invite God to assist with your meditation on the scripture passages. Read them several times slowly. What catches your attention? What emotions are evoked? What does the passage say about you or God? How are you being prompted to respond?

If you have any questions, concerns, feedback, or just want to share something with us, we welcome you sending us a note at redcloverabbey@gmail.com.

Grateful to journey with you,

Chris & Katrina

